

**Commissioner's Weekly Field Memo**  
**Friday, April 19, 2013**

**Notes from Commissioner Gist**

1. Commissioner to testify on bill that would change [graduation requirements](#)
2. Commissioner comments on [evaluation system](#)
3. Commissioner forming group to read, discuss [Cage-Busting Leadership](#)
4. RIDE transitions to newly designed [website](#)
5. Attorney General issues reminder on process for [criminal-background checks](#)

**From the R.I. Department of Education (RIDE)**

***School Finances:***

6. RIDE updates calculations of [education aid](#) for Fiscal Year 2014

***Educator Recognition:***

7. *Reminder:* RIDE seeking nominations for [Educator Talent Pool](#) – **Action Item**

***Instruction:***

8. [Virtual Learning Math Modules](#) Critical Friends Group meeting scheduled for **Wednesday**

***Meetings and training:***

9. *Reminder:* Work session scheduled for **Thursday** on IMS [curriculum-course linking](#)

***Technology:***

10. List of qualified vendors for [Wireless Classroom Initiative](#) posted

***Educator Evaluations:***

11. Final [Effectiveness Rating](#) Report forms posted on RIDE website
12. [Evaluation-data reporting](#) instructions for LEAs not fully implementing the EPSS to go on line on April 26

**From other state agencies**

13. Deadline for [blizzard](#) public-assistance requests extended

**From other organizations**

14. RIASCD seeks applications for [Whole Child Recognition](#) Program commendation

**Attachments to this Field Memo**

### **Action Item Calendar**

April 26: Spring 2013 [testing schedules](#) due

April 26: [Medicaid reimbursement](#) applications due

May 3: Educator Talent Pool nominations due (see [below](#))

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### **Notes from Commissioner Gist**

#### **1. Commissioner to testify on bill that would change graduation requirements**

On Wednesday (April 24), I will testify before the Senate Education Committee in opposition to a bill that would bar the use of state assessments as a component of the Rhode Island Diploma System. In light of this continuing public debate about the use of the NECAP assessments as one of our graduation requirements, it is important to bear in mind that our Diploma System has been many years in the making. Since the Board of Regents first approved our graduation requirements a decade ago, the Diploma System has grown and evolved over time. As we move through this transition to the new requirements that go into effect for next year's graduating class, our commitment is going to be tested – as it always is, when real change is put into place. Many people have expressed concerns – to me, and I'm sure to you as well – about our current graduation requirements. Their

concerns come from a genuine place: concern about our students. We share these concerns, of course, but I have faith in the Diploma System that we have designed. I also am very pleased by the way you and your school leaders have stepped up to help our students – with learning plans, supports, summer and afterschool programs, and tutoring. I've seen more movement in that regard statewide in the past two months than I'd seen over the past four years. Let's keep working together to support our students as they work to earn meaningful diplomas and to prepare for success in college and careers.

## **2. Commissioner comments on evaluation system**

I appreciate our ongoing conversations about the design and implementation of educator evaluations, and I am committed to continuous review of our evaluation system to ensure that it supports great teaching and learning in our schools and classrooms. The Board of Regents approved the Rhode Island Educator Evaluation Standards in December 2009. Since then, we have had a year of development, a year of field testing, and a year of gradual implementation – prior to this year of full implementation. Teachers and school leaders have been involved in every stage of the design and implementation process.

I am sure that we agree on the basic principle behind our evaluation standards: Students need effective educators in their classrooms, and it is essential that all educators be evaluated annually, as professionals should be. Educator evaluations provide teachers and school leaders with information and feedback that will help them continuously improve their skills and expertise.

The evaluation process does take time, especially in the first year. I believe it is important for teachers to think about their annual

learning objectives for their students and for school leaders to spend time observing classroom instruction in their building and working with their teachers on improving instruction. We continue to seek input on the implementation of educator evaluations in our state, and we remain committed to ongoing improvements, based on lessons learned and feedback from teachers and school leaders.

No other school-based factor has a greater effect on student achievement than the quality of the classroom teacher. I appreciate that across the state all schools and districts are moving forward with the evaluation process, and I know you will be able to use the information from the evaluation process to improve student achievement.

### **3. Commissioner forming group to read, discuss *Cage-Busting Leadership***

I have talked with a number of you about Rick Hess's book *Cage-Busting Leadership*. In fact, I know a few of you have already read it. In order to continue our dialogue on leadership, I wanted to host a book-discussion group on *Cage-busting Leadership*, so I'm hoping to gather a team of about three participants from each interested LEA for this discussion group. Given the content of the book, that team should include you plus some combination of other leaders in your LEA, such as folks from your central-office staff, your school-district attorneys, teachers and parent leaders, or members of your school committee. In fact, I understand that next month RIASC will host Rick Hess at a meeting in Rhode Island. If you are interested in participating the discussion group, send the names of those on your team to my assistant, Dana Wilson ([Dana.Wilson@ride.ri.gov](mailto:Dana.Wilson@ride.ri.gov)) by Friday, **May 3**. We have books

available for your team to read, and I believe that Rick will join us for our discussion this summer or fall — more details to follow.

**4. RIDE transitions to newly designed website,**  
**[www.ride.ri.gov](http://www.ride.ri.gov)**

You may have noticed that RIDE has transitioned to a newly designed website ([www.ride.ri.gov](http://www.ride.ri.gov)), which provides Rhode Islanders with information about our public schools. The newly designed site contains more interactive features, photographs and graphics, useful and informative data, and up-t- date news briefs and profiles about some of our great schools, educators, and students.

The newly designed site is organized around the five priorities of the Rhode Island strategic plan for transforming education: Great Schools, Excellent Educators, World-Class Standards, User-Friendly Data, and Wise Investments. The entire team at RIDE worked diligently over the course of many months to launch our new website, and we are very proud of the result. Our goals for the new site include:

- making the experience quick and easy for users to find the information they seek;
- offering ample opportunity for feedback;
- making data accessible;
- making policies, mandates, and initiatives understandable;
- making sure the site supports the work of educators; and
- demonstrating that our tax dollars are being invested wisely.

This site is a living organism, and it will feed off your input. Please let us know what we got right – and what we still need to work

on. Also, please encourage people in your community to take some time to explore our site.

#### **5. Attorney General issues reminder on process for criminal-background checks**

The Office of the Attorney General has called to remind us that the Bureau of Criminal Identification conducts Nationwide Criminal Background checks for prospective employees of school departments *only* after the applicant has received a conditional offer of employment (see R.I. General Laws 16-2-18.1[a]). The Bureau will not process the background check for any applicant who does not have a written conditional offer of employment, so I would like to remind you that you should not require applicants to undergo a criminal-background check until you have conditionally offered them a job.

The Bureau conducts the fingerprinting on weekdays between 8:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., and the process costs \$35. The Bureau accepts only checks or money orders. If you have questions about this process, you should contact the Office of the Attorney General, at 274-4400.

**From RIDE**

#### ***School Finances:***

#### **6. RIDE updates calculations of education aid for Fiscal Year 2014**

As part of the funding-formula law, state education aid is based on data from one year prior to the year in which the state distributes the aid. Therefore, we must base Fiscal Year (FY) 2014

aid on enrollment and free or reduced-price lunch data from FY 2013. To fulfill this mandate, we collected data on student enrollments and free or reduced-price lunch status from the beginning of the current school year through March 14. This information is annualized to reflect a full year. We also adjusted the calculations to account for the results of the charter-public-school lotteries held in March. Remember that the funding formula spreads all changes over the remaining years of the transition: over 5 years for those LEAs that currently receive insufficient state funding and over 8 years for those LEAs that currently receive an excess of state funding.

The net effect is an increase in education aid of \$1,939,952 from Governor Chafee's Recommended Budget for FY 2014. See the attached analysis (FY 2014 Formula Data Updates 4-11-13) for the changes by LEA. If this proposal is enacted by the General Assembly, final aid numbers will be updated.

Please note that we have forwarded this data to the Governor and to the General Assembly for their consideration. No changes will go into effect until the General Assembly passes, and the Governor signs, the annual appropriations bill.

If you have any questions, please contact Kristen Cole, at 222-4681 or [kristen.cole@ride.ri.gov](mailto:kristen.cole@ride.ri.gov).

### ***Educator Recognition:***

#### **7. *Reminder: RIDE seeking nominations for Educator Talent Pool – Action Item***

RIDE maintains a file of distinguished teachers and principals. Throughout the year, these educators may be considered for



membership on advisory boards and task forces, as well as for special recognition programs. This year, RIDE is asking each LEA to recommend up to 3 educators who represent educators relatively new to the profession (5 to 12 years in the profession) who demonstrate unusual instructional and inspiring presence that helps students, colleagues, and the community. Please click on the following link for more information:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/EducatorQuality/Recognition/default.aspx>

When you submit your recommendations, please include:

- Talent Pool Recommendation form;
- one-page narrative that addresses how each candidate meets the criteria; and
- resume of recommended educator.

Thank you for taking the time to make your recommendations.

Click on the following link to download the application:

[http://www.ride.ri.gov/EducatorQuality/Recognition/Recognition DOCS/Talent Pool Recommendation 2013-14.pdf](http://www.ride.ri.gov/EducatorQuality/Recognition/Recognition%20DOCS/Talent%20Pool%20Recommendation%202013-14.pdf)

The above application and process information is located under the “Info” tab in the “RI Teacher of the Year” section on the page.

Please send the completed packet of information by **May 3** to Mary Keenan, at [mary.keenan@ride.ri.gov](mailto:mary.keenan@ride.ri.gov).

***Instruction:***

## **8. Virtual Learning Math Modules Critical Friends Group meeting scheduled for Wednesday**

The Virtual Learning Math Modules Critical Friends Group supports local team members and site coordinators implementing the modules. The group will help participants understand the variety of delivery models being used by schools across the state. At meetings, participants will share questions and concerns, best practices, and management strategies and they will discuss Online Tutoring Session budgets and scheduling. Meetings will be held in an online environment designed to provide real-time interaction among participants. The first meeting is scheduled for **Wednesday** (April 24) at 2:30 p.m. Our Office of Multiple Pathways will contact site coordinators with meeting details.

### ***Meetings and training:***

## **9. *Reminder:* Work session scheduled for Thursday on IMS curriculum-course linking**

We invite you to join us for an Instructional Management System (IMS) work session on **Thursday** (April 25), from 9 a.m. to noon, at the North Providence High School Library, 1828 Mineral Spring Ave. This is not a training but a work session, during which LEA program and technical staff can complete tasks in the IMS, such as curriculum-course linking, with access to RIDE and Global Scholar staff. The session will be held in the library, with many desktop computers, so participants will not need to bring laptops; however, participants should bring the information they'll need to link courses to the corresponding curriculum in the IMS. For elementary schools, this may be a list of courses and information on the curriculum for each grade. For secondary schools, this

might include a course catalog or its equivalent. Attendance is limited to 20, so please register through e-RIDE. For more information on this session, contact Laura Kacewicz, at [laura.kacewicz@ride.ri.gov](mailto:laura.kacewicz@ride.ri.gov) .

### ***Technology:***

#### **10. List of qualified vendors for Wireless Classroom Initiative posted**

Great news: MPA#482, the Qualified Vendor list for the Wireless Classroom Initiative, is posted! Vendors received e-mail notification on Wednesday from the Division of Purchases. You may access the list of vendors using the following link – [www.purchasing.ri.gov](http://www.purchasing.ri.gov) – and clicking on “Master Price Agreements” (MPAs) in the left-hand column. Under the MPA number in the center, enter 482 and hit “Search.” On the next screen, click on the actual MPA number, and you will see the list of the 12 qualified vendors. Clicking on the specific award number will provide information on that vendor.

Next steps: Proceed to our new website and download copies of the LEA and Vendor Instruction documents, which have been updated, as well as the Site Survey Template. You can access our website at:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/FundingFinance/SchoolDistrictFinancialData/WirelessClassroomInitiative.aspx>

The LEA Instructions will provide the step-by-step information you need to move forward now that we’ve passed the last hurdle. Please contact Cindy Brown, at 222-4257 or

[wirelessinitiative@ride.ri.gov](mailto:wirelessinitiative@ride.ri.gov), if you have any questions about this initiative.

***Educator Evaluations:***

**11. Final Effectiveness Rating Report forms posted on RIDE website**

For LEAs implementing the Educator Performance and Support System (EPSS), the Final Effectiveness Rating Report forms are now live and detailed user guides are available on the RIDE website. For LEAs not implementing the EPSS, Word versions of the Final Effectiveness Rating Reports are available on the RIDE website. Educators can access both the Final Effectiveness Rating Report user guides and the Word versions of the reports at:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/EdEval-TrainingResources-EoY>

**12. Evaluation-data reporting instructions for LEAs not fully implementing the EPSS to go on line on April 26**

For schools and districts not fully implementing the Educator Performance and Support System (EPSS), a reporting template along with instructions will be available on the RIDE website Friday, **April 26**. The template will allow LEAs to document the required evaluation-component scores for all teachers and building administrators. The tool that will allow LEAs to upload their evaluation data file to EPSS will go live on Monday, May 13. The data-upload tool will be accessible on an administrative page in the EPSS to the individuals who have been designated by the LEA as the EPSS “District Configuration Administrator.”

**From other state agencies**

### **13. Deadline for blizzard public-assistance requests extended**

Please see this notice from the Emergency Management Agency:

The R.I. Emergency Management Agency (RIEMA) received approval from the federal government to extend the deadline for submitting Requests for Public Assistance to midnight on **Wednesday** (April 24). The previous deadline was midnight on Sunday (April 21).

RIEMA requested the extension so that school districts closed this week for spring break had enough time to complete and submit the required paperwork.

To download a *Request for Public Assistance* form or to learn more about eligibility, visit:

<http://www.riema.ri.gov/recovery/assistance/>

### **From other organizations**

### **14. RIASCD seeks applications for Whole Child Recognition Program commendation**

The Rhode Island ASCD has announced **May 15** as the extended deadline date for the second round of its Whole Child Recognition program. This recognition is designed to honor those schools that demonstrate a commitment to action for the whole child. It commends those educators who have gone beyond the inspirational words of a vision to actions that result in learners who are knowledgeable, emotionally and physically healthy,

civically active, artistically and academically engaged, prepared for economic self-sufficiency, and ready for the world beyond formal schooling.

Application details are available on the RIASCD website, at:

[www.riascd.org](http://www.riascd.org)

***RIDE will post this field memo on Tuesday, at:***

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/InsideRIDE/CommissionerDeborahAGist/FieldMemos.aspx>